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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 000006

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: SAUDI HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST FREE TO TRAVEL,
ENCOURAGED BY PROSPECT OF REFORM

REF: 05 RIYADH 4737

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for reasons
1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Ibrahim Mugaiteeb, President of the Saudi NGO, "Human Rights First" (HRF), informed Poloff that the SAG had returned his Saudi passport, and will allow him to travel to Germany to receive medical attention. Mugaiteeb also stated that he had met with the chairman of the National Human Rights Society (NHRS), Dr. Turki bin Khaled Al-Sudairi, who helped him secure the return of his passport. In those discussions, Mugaiteeb agreed to serve as an "unofficial" advisor to Dr. Al-Sudairi and the NHRS. The NHRS, whose chairman reports directly to King Abdullah, announced that it was officially open to receive complaints and petitions from Saudi citizens and expatriates concerning human rights issues. Mugaiteeb is optimistic about human rights reform efforts in the Kingdom, and about the work of the NHRS. End Summary.

¶2. (C) During a December 15 telephone conversation, Ibrahim Mugaiteeb (please protect), President of the still unrecognized Saudi NGO, "Human Rights First" (HRF), told Poloff that the SAG had returned his Saudi passport and would allow him to travel to Germany for medical treatment. Mugaiteeb had been in a Saudi hospital for 23 days, and was released on December 14. He had complained in previous conversations with Poloff that the SAG was intentionally withholding proper medical treatment for his ailing back, and that it was criminal that the SAG would not return his Saudi passport to allow him to travel outside of the Kingdom.

¶3. (C) Mugaiteeb stated that the new chairman of the National Human Rights Society (NHRS), Dr. Turki bin Khaled Al-Sudairi, was instrumental in securing the return of his confiscated Saudi passport. According to Mugaiteeb, Dr. Al-Sudairi interceded on his behalf with Assistant Minister of Interior Prince Mohammad bin Naif and Crown Prince Sultan, and managed to convince the SAG to return Mugaiteeb's passport. Mugaiteeb told Poloff that he is now free to travel to Germany to seek proper medical attention. He also complimented the German Embassy in Riyadh for its assistance, and said he was looking forward to making appointments with various human rights organizations in Germany.

¶4. (SBU) The National Human Rights Society (NHRS) is the government commission created in October 2005 to monitor and address human rights cases. The NHRS has 18 permanent full-time staff and six part-time employees. The King appoints board members to four-year renewable terms. Chairman Dr. Al-Sudairi was quoted in the Saudi press in early December 2005 as saying that the NHRS had officially opened its headquarters in Riyadh, and was receiving complaints and petitions from Saudi citizens and non-Saudi residents.

¶5. (C) Mugaiteeb is optimistic about the prospects of reform under Dr. Al-Sudairi and the NHRS, particularly since its chairman has the rank of minister and reports directly to King Abdullah. Mugaiteeb stated that he had met with Dr. Al-Sudairi twice, once as a guest in Al-Sudairi's home and once in Al-Sudairi's office, to discuss the SAG's unwillingness to license HRF officially, and the SAG's imposed travel ban on him. During their initial meeting, Dr. Al-Sudairi asked Mugaiteeb to stop his human rights campaign, and requested that he instead channel his grievances through the NHRS. According to Mugaiteeb, Dr. Al-Sudairi also offered him a part-time job with the NHRS. Mugaiteeb declined, but did agree to work with the NHRS as an "unofficial" advisor. He made it clear to Al-Sudairi that he would not accept employment with the SAG, but was comfortable passing human rights grievances and concerns to the NHRS before releasing the information to the public. Al-Sudairi assured Mugaiteeb that if the SAG does not allow him to do his work as Chairman, he will resign from the NHRS.

¶6. (C) Mugaiteeb also discussed minority representation on the NHRS with Al-Sudairi. He told the chairman that the commission must have representatives from the Sufi, Shi'a,

and Ismaili communities. They discussed possible candidates for board membership. Mugaiteeb said that Al-Sudairi was comfortable with many of the names he offered as possible candidates for membership on the commission.

17. (C) Comment: Mugaiteeb clearly sounded better than in previous telephone conversations. Normally suspicious and cynical of SAG human rights reform efforts, Mugaiteeb appears optimistic about changes occurring in the Kingdom. He is also encouraged by the support he has received from the NHRS and Dr. Al-Sudairi. He stated on a couple of occasions that Dr. Al-Sudairi has pledged his "unconditional support." This is in stark contrast to last July when the Ministry of Interior attempted to bribe Mugaiteeb to cease his human rights activism and threatened him with arrest (reftel). Mugaiteeb believes that Al-Sudairi is a good man, is not corrupt, and may have enough political influence to make a difference. He stated that he will likely depart the Kingdom for Germany in mid-January after the Eid al-Adha holiday. He ended the telephone conversation boasting, "the SAG will regret the fact that they allowed me to leave." End Comment.

18. (C) Biographic Data: NHRS Chairman Dr. Turki bin Khaled Al-Sudairi is in his sixties, and worked previously as a state minister and Cabinet member for eight years. Other post contacts have said that Dr. al-Sudeiri was handpicked by the SAG to form the NHRS, and would probably serve as the chairman for two years.

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